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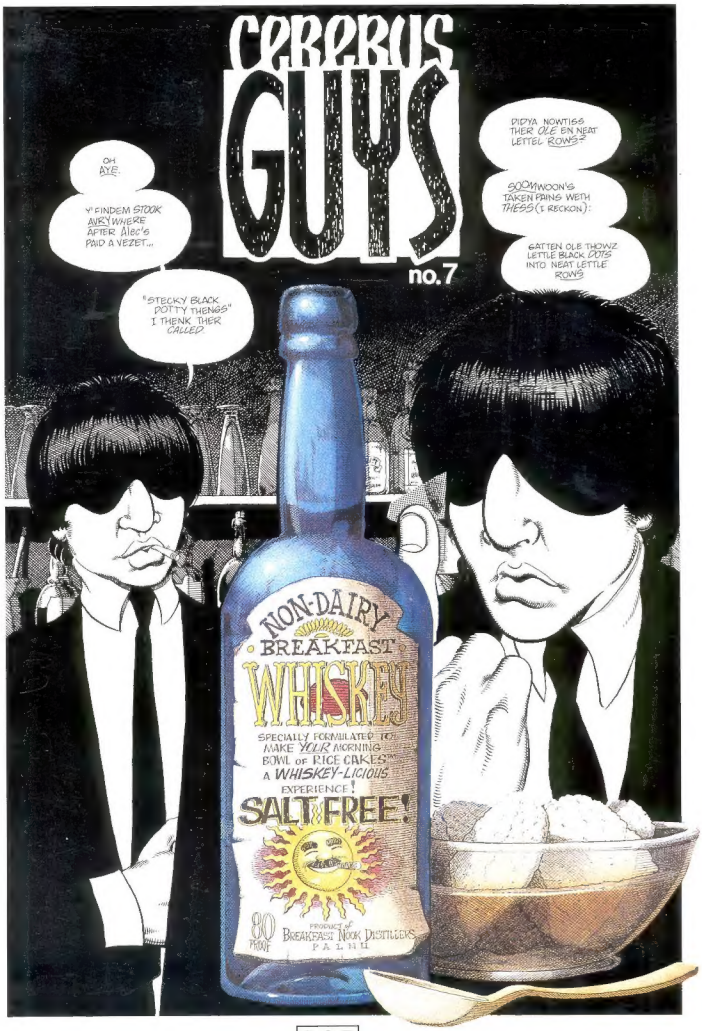
CEREBUS
GUYS
no.7
OH AYE.
Y' FINDEM STOCK AWKYWHERE AFTER Alec's PAID A VEZET...
"STECKY BLACK POTTY THENGS" I THENK THER CALLED
DIDYA NOWTISS THER OLE EN NEAT LETTEL ROWS?
SOOMWOON'S TAKEN PAINS WITH THESS (I RECKON):
GATTEN OLE THOWZ LETTLE BLACK DOTS INTO NEAT LETTLE ROWS
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207
JUN

CEREBUS

NO. 207 JUNE 1996

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GUYS
a novel
•
(Cerebus 201 to Cerebus 219)

MONTHLY
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was perplexing. Sufficiently perplexing to warrant — nay, demand! — a change to the fundament of his creative existence. That reads were now circulated in the same chaotic manner as non-Cirinist clothing, that no record existed of sales figure or print run, that no pattern was discernible in the distribution of creative work had implied a burden of eroded motive for Kingsley. Without accurate chart of progress or decline relative to literary peer or adversary, Kingsley's psyche had been cast adrift upon the waters of a profound dislocation. His mind thus sharpened on the whetstone of the paradigm shift, basic logic begged inference that one unknown audience might be as good as another. Largest possibilities were presented by the previously overlooked Cirinist auditors (Kingsley's own name for them — who could know what they called themselves?). At the extremity of distillation, he is seized by and seizes a notion — some manner of authority reads the transcriptions. No great extrapolation to envision the relay upward through a hierarchical chain. What other explanation? Cirinist success being everywhere in evidence, their preeminence assured on all fronts, the question is posed: what purpose is served by the ubiquitous stenographic presence? All antecedent empire imposed upon human society by Kingsley's own gender had suffered the consequence of turning a blinded eye to the inescapable onset of entropy's fatal kiss. No idea having been suppressed or sequestered in the time of the Cirinists' time, was it not possible that such longevity, durability, might at essence be attributed to the Cirinists' dogged pursuit or (at lowest measure of commonality) their tolerance of new analysis, new insight, new illuminations of varying radiance?

More than possible, Kingsley thought. More than possible by a wide margin.

Did he flatter himself that somewhere, at this very moment, the attentions of Great Cirin herself or a trusted member of her inner circle were (fully?) engaged by the transcript of Kingsley's extended monologue? That the very words now uttered by Kingsley might with great dispatch find their way to the top of some accumulation of prioritized discourse in the inner sanctum at . . . wherever Great Cirin's inner sanctum existed now that the ancient and corrupt city of lest was no more? Modesty was not his strong suit. If his literary life had taken shape around the exact parameters of his societal ambition — his compelling urge to facilitate and (where possible) initiate the largest possible changes in the name of the greatest common good: the size of his audience and the fluctuating nature of his popularity-cum-notoriety-cum-infamy mere means by which to achieve this central intention — the net effect was the persistence of the larger question. Why not eliminate indirect means and focus instead upon the primary objective?

Though Kingsley had vacillated over this insight for many days, uncertain if the internal argument showed evidence of a solidity sufficient to his purposes, still his instincts warned that others might — even now — be arriving at the selfsame conclusion. Some literary jackal might — even now — be eyeing the red and dripping meat of prominence intended for Norman Kingsley.

Modesty or no, Kingsley concluded, that thought was unendurable.

He now departs his third-person narration. Whoever is reading these words, now fully grounded in the convolutions of introspection which have brought the narrator to this nexus, is thus granted release from the vanity of his self-portraiture, the door now open for her infinitely more important task of assessing what merit there might be in his observations:

Things had improved and, what is more, had improved considerably. Among many great astonishments of recent vintage, this was foremost. Kingsley had endured the black and terrible times when fermented libation had first been dispensed gratis, convinced often through those sleepless nights, when the air was rent with the screams of men, maddened by their inebriation, wreaking havoc — one upon another — in the confines of the local tavern, that the very apocalypse might be descending.

His marriage, his status as husband and father, had afforded him the luxury of overview, the largest possible perspective, even as his gender had cannibalized itself, cannibalized all possible futures within the murky shroud of demon drink. What a toll had been extracted! What small and large violences had been committed upon heart and gut and liver as Kingsley had found the role of observer or bystander thrust upon him by the ignominy of hap-

penstance. Had he *not* been married — had he found himself *between* wives . . .

No, he has resolved to depart his third-person narrative and thus abandons the digression unfinished . . .

Rivers of blood had been spilt; viscera and sawdust mingled on roughhewn timber floors — no trace of hyperbole in the bald assertion. Rivers of blood and viscera had been washed away in harsh daylight, replaced, restored as twilight descended, crimson exclamation to punctuate the coming eternal night of man, underscoring mankind's failure and the failure of men. A tempest of madness raged in that darkness: ancient furies like waves ebbed and throbbed, hurled themselves outward, dashed themselves against cauldron's confines which turned them in upon themselves, returned them to their source, redoubled and now poisonous, now inescapable, seeking, then finding, previously unbreached corners of men's souls, the last frontiers of each man's humanity. Each denizen, each inhabitant, each inmate (these prisoners of gender) falling like dominoes, wholly, completely corrupted. The cooking pot of their violence had been soldered shut, and the fires beneath had been banked and stoked to the exact proportions of a purifying conflagration. The summer seemed eternal in that last-of-the-numbered years (1420? 1424?). It was as if the Sun Goddess herself had paused in her southerly migration, riveted, appalled, horrified, and intrigued by the tableau unfolding; the final act of mankind's greatest tragedy, self-inflicted as only the greatest tragedies are.

It must be said that Cirin had not flinched, had not wavered from her chosen course even as the tide of violence rose inexorably. Cirin had not flinched as wives and mothers and the husbands of wives and the sons of mothers had contorted themselves within a web of raw existence whose every burning strand seemed woven from the flayed and throbbing totality of their collective nerves — physically safe but, oh, what tortures of the psyche had been endured beneath a blazing sun!

Cirin had not flinched, had not wavered in the heat of the existential moment when a lesser mortal or a lesser goddess might be forgiven for surrendering to doubt in the face of looming possibilities implied by the uncertainty of outcome. She had measured the chance of her success not in the modest integers of possibility but rather by the bold numerals of likelihood. Before the unbreachable implacability of her steely resolve, the violence had subsided fitfully, then steadily, contained, compressed, and confined by the elasticity of her preeminent confidence. Thus restricted from natural expansion, allowing of no discharge, no release, the violence had subsided as she alone knew (knew!) it must.

In the aftermath of that dark time, Kingsley could only reiterate: things had improved and, what is more, had improved considerably.

His best literary instincts inform Kingsley that interest in his narrative erodes in lock step with such fulsome praise of the new societal order and its primary architect. The likelihood of thus being misread — misconstruction of his qualified admiration being rendered in false hues of obsequiousness — makes necessary flat assertion as vehicle in recovering the intellectual high ground:

Women read minds.

The stenographic pencil skips like a missed heartbeat, violating the regularity of the previous line; the gray strokes and dots and dashes commit small violences upon the parallel orderliness of prior observation. Straining for lost equilibrium, the instrument fails at its effort; small tremors in the hand echo the shifting sands of its owner's new uncertainty as the

inner sanctum of her awareness wrestles with Kingsley's simple utterance:

Women read minds.

What vessel could contain such an interpolation? What chalice, what flagon, what cup of the Goddess herself could impose upon it shape and dimension or measure the displacement effected by the dark, blood-red, and heady wine of that simple verb and its twin and plural consort nouns? Observe (as does Kingsley) how the pencil markings now sprawl and lurch across the page like so many rubber-legged seafarers on a storm-ravaged deck, seeking release, succor, solidity, finding, instead, still larger and more dangerous waves of so newly entrenched a disequilibrium of the psyche! Observe (as does Kingsley) how the eyes themselves — fabled windows upon the soul — flick and dart across the mayhem now ineradicably committed to and upon the page before them! No flagon she, thinks Kingsley, his dual voice in her ears and in her mind, measured, calm and even, placid upon the waters of his own certainty.

Who could know what modifications of his meanings were taking place in the new maelstrom of her imbalance? With wide oceans of implication beckoning to him, one voyage (or many!) to the inner realms of awareness now made possible — nay, inevitable! — by his simple reconnaissance of the immediate perimeter of the first shoreline, is Kingsley now to embark on so historic an odyssey in tandem with a craft so demonstrably, so self-evidently inadequate to the high purpose he intends?

With uncharacteristic magnanimity, Kingsley — replying in the negative — grants all benefit of intrinsic doubt. The assignment of this tremulous amateur to a task too far in excess of her limited aptitudes was a forgivable oversight rendered (he had no doubt) at the lower extremities of the Goddess' body politic. So grievous an underestimation was attributable to the structural shortcomings of a pyramidal system. Mostly unmindful of the metaphorical blow thus struck below the belt of his self-opinion, Kingsley relished instead the irrefutable evidence of the low regard in which his potentialities (prodigious to be sure!) were held, relished the advantages such adversarial overconfidence implied. Kingsley is underestimated? Well and good. Kingsley is underestimated. The immediate challenge takes form from his inference:

Before Kingsley could fulfill — could even *begin* to fulfill — the larger promise of his anticipated navigation, he would be compelled, first, to pursue the achievement of a worthier adversary, then a still worthier adversary, and so on: until some figure of eminence, commensurate with his own stature, presented herself for assessment. What progress was possible along these very lines, Kingsley was certain, might be measured in the exact number of wasteful digressions he would be forced to endure. For the moment, an early meeting with the living incarnation of the Goddess — Cirin herself — must be regarded (even Kingsley's vanity has its limits) as remote in its possibility. Lest this challenge (for challenge it was) be underestimated, Kingsley hastens to point out that even as Cirin herself would take *his* measure from these words, so too would Kingsley himself weigh her in a comparable balance. His opinion of her would rise or fall in consequence of his best assessments of each successive proxy set in opposition to him. No small disappointment would attach itself to the arrival of a comparably weak and equally wearisome spear-carrier, plucked from those ranks most distant from Cirin's noble and historic procession.

SHE WATCHED AS KINGSLEY STROVE AWAY FROM HER, TOWARDS THE TAVERN WHERE HE WOULD AWAIT THE ARRIVAL OF HER REPLACEMENT -- THE TAVERN WHICH WOULD BE HIS ARENA EACH DAY FROM MID-AFTERNOON UNTIL SUNDOWN -- "FOR SO LONG AS IT TAKES" WAS HIS GRIM THOUGHT.
SHE WATCHED HIM GO...
...AND THEN HURRIED OFF IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION

THE DAMNDEST PART IS THAT THEY AREN'T ANY HAPPIER ABOUT IT THAN WE ARE---IT'S LIKE A BIG GAME... OF CHICKEN
LIGHT RUM AND TONIC
COOMEN RAIGHT OOP.
A BIG GAME OF CHICKEN.
EGGZACKLY.
A BIG GAME OF CHICKEN HOWZ
NOBIDDY WANTS TO MAKE TH' FIRST MOVE--TH' WATTAYACALLIT WOMEN WAN' US TO MAKE THE FIRST MOVE
AN' TH' WATTAYACALLIT MEN WON' US TOO B'CAUSE THEY WANT TH' WOMEN T'MAKE TH' FIRST MOVE
SO WHO MAKES THE FIRST MOVE?
WELL SEE THASS THE THING THASS THE THING
WHAT'S THE THING?
UHHHHHH OH WHAT WAS I SAYING?
WHO MAKES THE FIRST MOVE?
RIGHT.... SEE THEY HOWE A FIRST MOVE AN' WE HAVE A FIRST MOVE AN' OUR FIRST MOVE IS TO TRY T'GETTEM INNA BED. RIGHT?
RIGHT.
RIGHT! AN' THEIR FIRST MOVE IS TO GETTA KNOW US BEDDER...TO AN' YOU KNOW? GETTA KNOW US BEDDER
GET TO KNOW US BETTER
EGGZACKLY...
BUT THASS NO GOOD...
NO?
NAW SEE 'CAUSE IF THEY GETTA KNOW US BEDDER THEN THEY FINE OUT WE JUS' WANNA GEDDEMINNA BED
SO WE TRYDA FIGGER OUT SOMEONE WE CAN BE SURE THEY CAN GETTA KNOW WE BEDDER BESIDES WHO WE AKE. WHICH IS SOMEONE WHO JUS' WANNA GEDDEMINNA BED
THANKS.
UH-HUH.
SO THE THING IS WHAT WE GOTTA DO IS MAKE IT SO SOMEONE WHO WE SURE WON BEDDER WHO'S SOMEONE WHO WE SURE WON BEDDER WHO'S SOMEONE WHO WE SURE WON BEDDER WHO'S

HUH!
SO THAT'S WHY YOU BROKE UP WITH ZIGGY?
UHHHHH...
WELL I'LL BE A MONKEY'S UNCLE!
IZ THAT WHAT WE WERE TALKIN' ABOUT?!
HAHAHAHAA
HA
POUND
POUND
HA
HA
HA
HAHA
HA
HA
HA
HA
NONO SEE WITH ZIGGY'S MADE UP A PERSON FER T' BEETA KNOW BEDDER SEE AN I FOUN OUT THAD SUMMERS'A GO'S DIDN SEE THAT PERSON BE I WAS
3 HIC'S
THAD PERSON.
3 SNICKER'S "IS THAT WHAT WE WUS TALKING ABOUT?"
HAHA NONO LISSEN LISSEN

TH'THING I WAS SEE TH'THING WAS
IT'S LIKE THIS FRIEN' OF MINE RIGHT? WHEN'E BROKE UP WITH'IZ WIFE HE SEZ-
I SEE 'IT DOZEN' BOTHER ME BEIN' FIFTY YEARZ OLD WHILE'BOTHERZ ME IS BEIN' MARRIED TO A WOMAN OOZ FIFTY YEERZ OLD
WELL TH' THING I'Z SEE THE THING IZ...NOW EEE MARRIED TO A WOMAN OOZ THE SAME AGE AZZI'Z EX-WIFE..... SO.... THERIDIZ
THERE WHAT IS?
WELL WE AIN' GEDDIN' ANY YOUNGER ARE WE?
SO YOU BROKE UP WITH ZIGGY BECAUSE SHE WAS TOO OLD.
ZIGGY? FUG NO. ZIGGY'S IN 'ER MID-TWENNIES....
BUD THASS TH'THING I SEEE! THASS TH'THING!
WHAT'S THE THING?
OKAY LIKE WITH MY FRIEN'... HE FIGURES HE CAN'T BE MARRIED TO SUMBUDDY FIFDEE YEARS OLD BUT HE ENZUP MARRIED IZ FIFDEE YEARS OLD SO THE THING IS
ANYWAY SO THE THING IS SEE THE THING IS YOU CAN SAY WHY DID YOU BROKE UP WITH SUMBUDDY BUT!
WHY YOU SAY! WHEN YOU BROKE UP WITH SUMEBUDDY AND WHEN YOU REALLY BROKE UP WITH SUMEBUDDY THINGS!
SKETCH SKETCHA SKETCH SKETCHA
HIC!
SO YOU DON'T KNOW WHY YOU BROKE UP WITH ZIGGY?
OH I KNOW EGGZACKLY WHY I BROKE UP WITH ZIGGY.
OH
AN' IZDIZ'N'T EEE TH' REASON YOU WOULD THINK....
NO?
NAWWW... WELL ID NEVER IZ, IZZIT?
I MEAN THADS WHAD I BIN TRYNE TELL YA
OKAYISSEEN.
I'LL GO THROUGH IT AGAIN.
TIME..... MORE..... ONE.....
OKAY..... NOW.

THE REASON I BROKE UP WITH ZIGGY....
WELL.....
THERE WERE A LOTTA REASONS
BUT THE MOS' IMPORTANT REASON WAS:
I DIDDEN KNOW
YOU DIDN'T KNOW WHAT THE MOST IMPORTANT REASON WAS?
NONONONONO I KNEW TH' MOS' IMPORTANT REASON THE MOS' IMPORTANT REASON WAS
I DIDDEN KNOW
DIDN'T KNOW WHAT?
A LOTTA THINGS (Y'KNOW WE MAKING THIS A LOT MORE COMPLICATED THANNIPNEEZA BE BY INNER S FACS RUPPING ALLATIME)
SORRY.
'SOKAY.
BASIGLY... BASIGLY I BROKE UP WITH ZIGGY BECAUSA I THOUGHT "WELL I'M GONNA BREAK UP WITHER SOME TIME SO IT'S ZEN A QUESTION OF IF I'M GONNA BREAK UP WITHER IT'S A QUESTION OF WHEN I'M GONNA BREAK UP WITHER AN' I KNEW IT WOULD ONLY GET HARDER TH' LONGER I WAIDED SO I THOUGHT "WEUR THERE NOT TIME LIKE TH' PRESEN" SO THASSWHUT I DID AN' THEN I WEN' OUT 'N' I STARTED LOOKIN' FER SOMEONE ELTZ AN' THEN I KNEW I DIDDEN KNOW CUZIFFS KNEW WHAT WUZ I DOIN' LOOKIN' FER SOMEONE ELTZ.
SEE. CAUSE TH' SOMEONE ELTZ IF I FOUN' EM, WHICH I NEVER DID I WOULDA BIN BACK WHERE I STARTED SAYIN' "IT'S NOT A MADDER OF IF I'M GONNA BREAK UP WITHEM IT'S A MADDER OF WHEN" IN WHICH CASE WAH DO I BREAK UP WITH ZIGGY IF ALL I WAS GONNA DO WITH THAT SOMEONE ELTZ WAS TH' SAME THING I JUSS GOT OUT OF?
SO WHY DID YOU?
CAUSES I COL' PAL, I DIDN'T KNEW TH' ANSWER! THAT ONE.
I'D BE ONE... VERY HAPPY GUY

AFTANOON MIZZUZ T
GOOD AFTANOON, R'CHARD
I'M 'ARRISON, MIZZUZ T RICHARD'S THE LITTLE FELLA WOT DUE
YES OF COSS! THAT'S A VEDDY SMART-FITTING SHIRT YAW WEDDING
THANGYEW MIZZUZ T
IS IT NYEW?
WHAT WOULD MAKE TWO OF US
HIS HANAR
NOTHING
NAW.
OR, I MEAN - NO, MIZZUZ T, I JOOST WASHT IT THOW
MM
AH! I SEE YUV TAKEN MY ADVICE ABOUT GETTING MAW SUN.
YAW GUVNAW IS MUCH IMPROVED.
VEDDY MUCH IMPROVED
JYOSE'S JHANGEN MIZZUZ T
NOW DON'T YOU MIND US! WE SHALL BE HERE FOR SOME TIME! YOU JUST BE ON ABOUT YAW BIZZNIZZ
MMMMM
THAAAT'S RIGHT
KORF'S JIZZ MUZZUZ T
MISTAH KINGSLEY?
HOW DO YOU DO?
I AM MISSIZ THATCHUH

DOINK
DOINK
HEY MARDY ol' mumble ol' pal - I DIDN'T EXPECTYEE SEE YUH SHACE CUM IN
THAT'S OKAY THOSE I DIDN'T SEE ME COME IN EITHER
HEEHEEHEEHEEHEE
I'll HAVESPEN A WUNNERFUL DAY DRINKING BREAKFUST AT THE STARCHILD SO I WOULD SOON BE COME FOR A
THOTE NIGHT CAP.
NIDECAPS
YES!
JUSSA.
SMALL ONE
NIDECAPS
MARDY.. SAY FUGGEN MIDDLE O'TH AFTERNOON!
DOINK DOINK DOINK
SO IT IZ
IN THAT CASE
I SHALL HAVA LARGE NIGHD CAP

HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
"IN THAT CASE--I SHALL HAV A LARGE NIGHP CAP"
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
(HA HA HAAA HAHA))
"IN THAT CASE I'LL HAVE A LARGE NIGHP CAP."
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HAHAHA
HA HA
HA HA
HH--
HAHAHA

Mrs. . . . Thatcher is it? Very nice to meet you.

And it's very nice to meet *you* as well, Mr. Kingsley. Celestia here informs me that you are delusional.

***[laughs]* Well, that remains to be seen, doesn't it? Whether I'm delusional or you are.**

My perceptions are quite sound, Mr. Kingsley, I assure you.

Well, as I say, that remains to be seen.

Yes. Well. Have you ever considered, Mr. Kingsley, why you have this pressing need to frighten people?

Certainly. Have you ever considered why you're afraid all the time?

You think I'm frightened of you, Mr. Kingsley?

That remains to be seen as well. It didn't take you very long to get here. My best speculation would be —

You frightened poor Celestia, Mr. Kingsley. She was afraid you were about to become violent, the way you were snarling at her, mere inches away from —

She needn't have worried. If I were —

But she *did* worry, Mr. Kingsley. She was frightened half out of her —

Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me. I think, if we're going to make any progress here, we're going to need some little old ground rules. And the first ground rule is going to have to be that we don't interrupt each other. I'll have my say, and then you have your say. Fair?

Bullying someone, Mr. Kingsley, is never the way we make our points, is it? We make our points by calmly stating our case in a reasonable and modulated voice. Don't we? Mmm? That's right.

There. I didn't interrupt you. Now, let's leave aside for the moment the reason that you got here so quickly. You've stated for the record that you were concerned that I was about to commit an act of violence against Celestia here, and I have —

I was not "stating it for the record," Mr. Kingsley. You make it sound as if I fabricated a reason to come here, when I have already told you that I was concerned for Celestia's welfare.

There. Again I *didn't* interrupt you, even after *you* interrupted *me*.

Go on, Mr. Kingsley.

Now, if it is the case that I frightened Celestia, then, Celestia, I apologize unreservedly. I can assure you that that was not my intention. Now, let me state for the record that I think what brought you here was my assertion that women read minds.

Nonsense, Mr. Kingsley. Celestia informed me that you were delusional and quite possibly violent. I hadn't the slightest idea what form your delusions had taken, but now I see that the form of your delusions is . . . singular. And alarming.

You seem like a very intelligent woman, Mrs. Thatcher —

Thank you, Mr. Kingsley.

Not at all. I find it hard to believe that Celestia found you wherever you were, told you that she had been frightened by a delusional author, and you didn't ask what had led her to that conclusion.

As I told you, Mr. Kingsley, she said that she was afraid that you were about to become violent.

And you didn't ask her what had led her to that conclusion?

What led her to that conclusion, Mr. Kingsley, was the fact that you were snarling mere inches from her face.

Can we talk about my reputed delusion?

It is not a "reputed" delusion, Mr. Kingsley.

Do women read minds?

Really, Mr. Kingsley. Listen to yourself.

Actually, I'm listening to you. And I didn't hear the word "no."

I did not come here, Mr. Kingsley, to be interrogated by you.

Which is the reason for the first ground rule. If we both are able to talk without interruption, then neither of us is interrogating the other. We're having a discussion. If I were to say that I am not convinced that "women read minds" is an entirely accurate observation, perhaps that might lead us toward more productive areas.

I'm listening, Mr. Kingsley. Do go on.

There are obvious problems with it. If women read minds, how does one account for infidelity or any of a variety of acts of bad faith committed by husbands? If their wives could read their minds, how could they keep any secrets? And yet, clearly, husbands keep secrets from their wives.

That's very true, Mr. Kingsley.

So, we retrench a small distance from the flat assertion to avoid the unpleasantness of interrogation. I will assert, instead, that something exists in very close proximity to my theory and spare you the need to indulge in the verbal contortions required to avoid answering the direct question. Perhaps we are dealing with a phenomenon of a more imprecise and intermittent nature — something as unpredictable and highly charged as, say, lightning. Perhaps that is close to a precise metaphor. Lightning can briefly illuminate the entirety of the landscape. Everything is darkness, and then for a split second . . . or two . . . or three . . . all is visible as it is in the most brilliant afternoon sunshine. Or a vague pulsation is the result, illuminating very little beyond a suggestive outline in the immediate vicinity of the viewer. Picture a city where there is no sunshine, only darkness pierced by such lightning. How would persons raised in such an environment move about? They would move cautiously, waiting for the next bolt to appear, their every sense attuned to it as they waited, and when it struck they would memorize everything in that split second of clearest perception. Their next moves in the immediate aftermath would be bold, decisive — memory of the illuminated scene guiding them to an immediate goal. Once there, they would move cautiously again, waiting, focussing, anticipating.

Do you really believe that, Mr. Kingsley?

For the moment, let's leave aside questions of whether I believe it or not, in favour of an interesting extrapolation. At the retrenched position let's consider the nature of such a phenomenon as expressing itself differently in each individual woman. She first experiences her individual manifestation of the phenomenon as a young girl. It is an awareness quite apart from sensory perception but having many things in common with it. How would you describe the colour orange to a blind person? She finds herself in a comparable situation, unable to describe with any accuracy what happens in those moments of acute perception or the immediate aftermath when she achieves a greater . . . effectiveness? The effects themselves would be most alarming to her, and, bearing in mind the universal laws of consequence, of action and reaction, she would, though trial and error, be made aware of the limits, the boundaries, of her particular manifestation of this . . . force, let us say. She would be aware that others of her gender participate, each unable to describe with any accuracy her individuated nature beyond "there it goes again."

I must ask you again, Mr. Kingsley, being otherwise at a loss for words, do you believe what you are saying?

Let me approach the question tangentially. Do I believe that there is a central mystery to the female gender which exists in proximity to what I am saying? The answer to that is an unqualified yes.

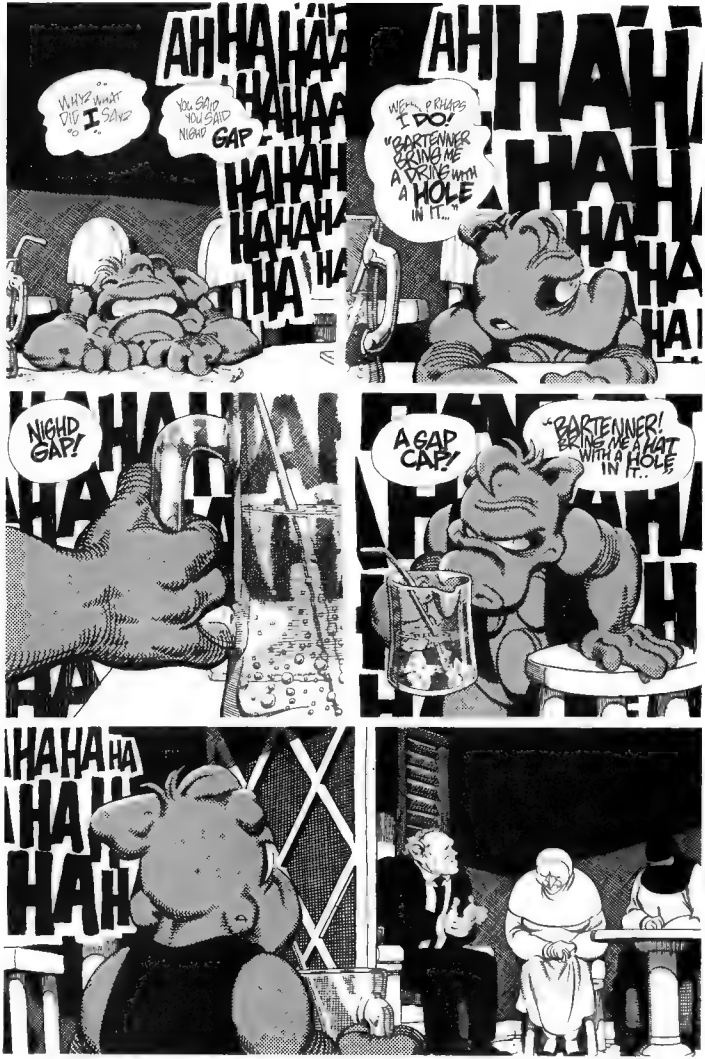
I feel, Mr. Kingsley that you are making too much of very little Everyone experiences little . . coincidences, don't they? Mmm? That's right. The mind plays its little tricks on us all. The key to our mental well-being is that we recognize those little tricks for what they are that we remain strong and well-balanced and resist falling prey to unhealthy speculations. After all, Mr. Kingsley, unhealthy speculations can only lead to unhealthy living — just as unhealthy living, in your case, has led to unhealthy speculations

All right. Let's take your own phrases: "little coincidences" and "the mind plays little tricks on us all." At a specific level you are engaging my argument on my own terms, which is progress of a kind. You acknowledge the phenomenon even as you diminish it to insignificance. Only you would know with any certainty if you have diminished the phenomenon — the phenomenon as you experience it — to a point just below or well below its actual proportions. Experience tells me that exploration in that area will prove unproductive. You say it's small and meaningless; I say it's large and meaningful. Now, bearing in mind your own actual perception of it — whether that is the perception you've just enunciated or whether it is otherwise — is it not possible that the phenomenon would manifest itself in others in greater and lesser proportion to your own experience of it? By that I mean, if you are able to draw a connection between yourself and what I am saying, and if your experience with these intermittent . . . exertions . . . posited by my theory are actual and not theoretical, and if those experiences are contained within you, a mystery even to yourself as regards cause, effect, and predictability, is it not altogether likely that those proportions would vary and the . . . effects . . . inadvertently created . . . or occupying various degrees of the inadvertent . . . might well be mirrored in effects which have been created and imposed upon you by others?

I'm not sure what it is you're trying to say, Mr Kingsley, and I have the distinct impression that you're not sure either

On the contrary. Let me be more direct. What if you're not very good at it? What if your aptitude as regards this internal mystery is less developed in yourself than in others of your gender? If I take you at your word — there are small coincidences and tricks of the mind that you freely acknowledge. Is it not possible that your effort to resist, to suppress, to sequester such phenomena — your very success in achieving that goal — has left you undeveloped and at the mercy of those who have developed a greater proficiency? No one can measure a mystery, can they? Peel away the layers implied by the question and, lo, another question appears: who contains the greatest proficiency? Who has mastered the unknown quantity? Where are they, and what do they intend? Peel away the layers implied by those questions and, lo, still larger questions appear: those with the greatest proficiency, would they not perceive themselves as the logical heirs to Cirin's own movement? Would they not burrow within the present structure, shaping it to their own ends by their undetectible means? Where cause is hidden from all view, does effect not become the sole measure? Is Cirin's movement going in the direction she intended? If her best assessment affirms the negative, does that not imply the presence of an otherwise undetectible but altogether greater proficiency than her own?

YOU HAVE A MAHVELOUS IMAGINAT ON, MISTAH KINGSLEY!
AND TOMORROW WE CAN DISCUSS MAW SUITABLE APPLICATIONS FOR IT
MMMMMMMM?
THAAAT'S RIGHT
THE SUN WON'T BE SETTING FOR A LITTLE WHILE YET, MRS. THATCHER
OF COURSE IF ALL OF THIS IS PROVING TOO MUCH FOR YOU...
IF I'M MAKING YOU UNCOMFORTABLE
OR IF YOU FIND THAT YOU NEED TIME TO RECOVER YOUR...
WITS
WHY...


AH HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA HA HA
HA
WHAT DID I SAID SO?
YOU SAID YOU SAID NIGHD GAP
WELL... PERHAPS I DO!
"BARTENDER BRING ME A DRINK WITH A HOLE IN IT..."
NIGHD GAP!
A GAP CAP?
"BARTENDER! BRING ME A HAT WITH A HOLE IN IT..."
HA HA HA
HA HA
HA

parthenogenesis — which is to say the generation of new life without fertilization. If what is rumored is true — that Cirin has discovered a means by which human sperm can be preserved and used to fertilize human eggs without need of the procreative act — then she has created the first and most real possibility of the male gender's elimination *in toto*. No large difficulty to follow the sequence of her thinking, having at its core the conviction that "maleness" is aberrational. In those species where reproduction is effected through parthenogenesis, males are produced solely to counter the threat posed by that species' natural predators. Males are extruded, if you will, in a fashion analogous to quills on a porcupine or spikes on a cactus. Once the immediate threat is eliminated, once the predator population has been sufficiently reduced in its size, the species returns to a condition of producing exclusively — or primarily — female offspring. Confining unmarried males to the taverns, Cirin effectively engineered the elimination of the sharpest quills and spikes — to extend the metaphor. I would speculate that she has now entered a period of assessment of the implications of the success of the first phase of her great societal experiment. I reiterate my first observation in that regard: things have improved, and, what is more, they have improved considerably. A level of palpable tension [illegible] previously

terms — elimination of the bully, the demagogue, the aggressor, has alleviated a primary pressure in the lives of the individual members of my gender. If we are without our military triumphs, if we are no longer tested, daily, in the crucible of small and large required braveries, the unspoken consensus — unspoken because the self-accusation of cowardice is never far from our psyches — is that we have been relieved of an unwelcome burden. What is more interesting to me is the sense of an inescapable increase in tension in the female gender, escalating in direct proportion to its diminishment in males. Those hardships endured by Cirin and her followers in your decades-long pursuit of your largest goals were endured — as are all hardships — in the name of the implicit promise that conditions will improve once those largest goals are achieved. But the achievement has brought with it, as I have observed, merely an increase in internal tension, an excruciating circumstance, to be sure, for the emotive gender. What has been overlooked — in attempting to achieve a "gender balance" — is that weakened men, the implied net effect, are inadequate to the purposes of the strengthened woman. Examined at the individual level, the marriage or partnership of the weakened man and the strengthened woman becomes, inevitably, an adversarial battle-ground. What tension already exists is thus increased. The weakened man, wearied by the relentless psychic warfare of his daily existence with the strengthened woman, chooses to concede in the interest of maintaining some semblance of tranquility, however temporary. His tension thus reduced, her tension increases as she assumes all burdens of responsibility which once were his. Her increasing strength and the increasing tension thus implied wreak havoc upon her emotions. In command, in control of the joint destiny, she is forced to seek out newer and more esoteric reasons for her unease. On his part, the weakened man is rewarded with a new, unfamiliar but not unwelcome sense of calm, gratifying to him out of all proportion to the rewards experienced as a result of the command and the control he previously possessed. He becomes so-and-so loving command and control that he begins to do so-and-so into a state not dissimilar to that of so-and-so ward illumination which results from so-and-so profound introspection, and so-and-so

HAHA
HAHA
HA
THROB
THROB
HAHAHAHAH
HAHAHAHA
HAHAHAAAA
HAHAHA
HEY! HEY CERBISS
SUCK
SUCK
SUCK
WHAT
DIDJA HEAR THAT ONE?
WHAT ONE.
HANH? DIDJA?!
NAY

THIS DOCTOR SEE -- HE'S EXAMINING THIS OL' GUY SEE? THIS REAL OL' GUY.... AN' TH' DOCTOR ASKS THE GUY "SAY HAVE YOU HAD...."
NONONO
WHISPER WHISPER
SO THE OLD GUY HE TELLZA DOCTOR THAT HIS DICK IS THROBBING (-- LIKE -- NOT THE DOCTORS DICK- THE OL' GUY'S DICK) IS THROBBING, SEE?
SO THE DOCTOR ASKS 'IM --- HE ASKS "HAVE YOU HAD SEX RECEN'LY?"
AN' THE OL' GUY SEZ -- HE SEZ
"YEAH -- ABOU' TEN DAYS AGO. WHY?"
SO TH' DOCTOR ASKS 'IM 'E ASKS 'IM "DO YOU REMEMMER TH' NAME O' TH' WOMAN YOU HAD SEX WITH?
'N' THE OL' GUY SEZ "YEAH".
AN' TH' DOCTOR ASKS 'IM 'E ASKS 'IM "DO YOU REMEMMER WHERE SHE LIVES?"
AN' TH' OL' GUY SEZ 'E SEZ "YEAH."
AN' TH' DOCTOR SEZ 'E SEZ "IS SHE HOME RIGHT NOW?"
AN' TH' OL' GUY SEZ 'E SEZ "I THINK SO."
SO TH' DOCTOR SEZ 'E SEZ... "WELL YOU BETTER GET OVER THERE RIGHT NOW"

"YOU'RE ABOUT TO COME!"
SPLAT
HAHAHAHAHAHA
DOINK DOINK DOINK DOINK
HAHAHA
OUPGE
HAHAHA
OUPGE
HAHA

SPIRITS HAVING FLOWN

It's an emotion-based world.

That was my best analysis going into the Montreal Spirits stop this past weekend. What is the effect on self-publishing of people like Teri Wood, Colleen Doran, Terry Moore, and others moving into the traditional publishing environs from self-publishing? So far, emotional. What is the emotional reaction of the retailers? Will there be a backlash against Image and its various studios? Yes. But the fact remains that a self-publisher's circulation goes up dramatically when he or she takes his or her book to a company. Although Drew Hayes' numbers on ***Poison Elves*** have dropped considerably from the first Sirius issue high, they are well above his numbers as a self-publisher. There's no reason to believe that the same won't be true of *Wandering Star, Strangers in Paradise, A Distant Soil,* and others. I cringed while reading Teri Wood's interview in one of the slick fanzines where she describes Drew coming up to her table in San Diego and saying, "I guess you hate me now because I'm not a self-publisher." Teri said no, Drew seemed to be doing fine, and she wished someone would offer her a deal like his. Drew talked to Sirius, Sirius talked to Teri, and the deal was done. She concluded with the observation that "probably everyone now hates [her] in the self-publishing *business*" (italics mine).

I have no place in a world that dominated by emotion, and I should have known that.

Two self-publishers who sell around four hundred copies an issue approached me in Montreal to ask what they should do, having been approached by Caliber. They were both afraid (emotion) that I would get mad (emotion) at them. I told them it was their decision. They should sit down and assess what the pros and cons are and make a decision based on that. They both want to keep self-publishing, but they are losing money issue after issue. They were afraid (emotion) that other self-publishers would feel (emotion) that they were betraying the cause.

Self-publishing is not a cause or a movement. Self-publishing is a choice, an option. Viewed dispassionately (something that seems to be beyond most people's abilities), it is a good way to come to the attention of the overall marketplace — fans, retailers, and distributors — for a reasonably small financial investment and a lot of hard work. Some books sell well; some books sell badly. Those that sell badly erode to the point where it is no longer feasible to continue. At that point the individual self-publisher can choose to stop, choose to keep going or choose to find a publisher, or choose to accept an offer made by a publisher. I was offered the chance to write *Howard the Duck* at a time when Deni and I were making very little money on *Cerebus*. I chose not to. I was offered a reprint deal by DC. I chose not to accept it.

Each individual self-publisher has comparable options. You have to do what you *feel* (since no one thinks anymore) is right for you and for your book. I think you are better off *thinking* about what is right for you and for your book, but, hey . . .

It is impossible to abdicate from a public perception. I am perceived to be a leader, a champion, a guru, a godfather of self-publishing. That perception is inaccurate. I am *a* self-publisher. One. Individual. Self-publisher. I prefer self-publishing. If we get to a point where it is no longer feasible to self-publish *Cerebus*, Gerhard and I will discuss our options and select what we think is the best alternative to self-publishing. There have been many crisis points in *Cerebus*' eighteen-year history when I have had to think very seriously about other options. In each case the crisis period subsided, and I no longer had to focus on the options available. You can trust me, however, that I never once considered whether people would *hate* me for my choice.

Kevin and Peter decided to go the Hollywood/merchandising route with the Turtles. Jeff Smith chose to take *Bone* to Image. It is not what I would have done in their situation, but I don't *hate* them for it. Terry Moore was *afraid* (emotion) to call me and tell me that he was taking *Strangers in Paradise* to Homage. There was nothing for him to be *afraid of*. As I told him, starting back with the Toronto and Northampton summits, a number of creators worked very hard to improve conditions for creators. Scott's Bill of Rights is a very tame, Mom's-apple-pie kind of document eight years later on. At the time, it was perceived as a rabidly radical document. What was set in motion back then has led to companies like Image and Caliber, and Drawn &

Quarterly, Black Eye, and others following a strict policy of non-interference in creative work. The most recent improvement is the "departure clause," which allows the creator to depart at any time with no legal consequences. *That* was considered a rabidly radical notion when Deni and I did not contest Bill Loebs taking *Journey* to Fantagraphics.

Terry thanked me for supporting his decision.

I can only shake my head. No one listens. *No one* listens.

I don't support Terry's decision. I think it is wrong-headed in just about every way I can consider it. I support Terry's right to *make* the decision. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness — I think I read that somewhere once.

All that is happening is that control in the comic-book marketplace is moving towards the creators and away from the publishers and distributors. Neal Adams, Frank Miller, Scott McCloud, Kevin Eastman, Larry Marder — a whole range of people have worked over the last thirty years to improve creator rights in the comic-book field. The more rights creators have, the more choices they have and the more decisions — as a consequence — they have to make. Every day, individual creators have to decide whether to change the way they are conducting their career or to continue conducting their career as it is currently constituted.

I have said before that I don't think emotion is a sensible thing upon which to base a decision. I would advise against making decisions based on emotion. But that is one very real option for creators, and it is the right of each creator to make decisions based on whatever he or she makes decisions on — a ouija board if that's what you *feel* is best.

But let me just state for the record that I have no *feeling* about your creativity. Who*ever* you are. I have no *feeling* about your decisions. Who*ever* you are. I have realized that it is impossible to assist other self-publishers without being perceived as a leader, guru, godfather, or what have you. It is impossible to stage events centered around self-publishers without self-publishing becoming a "movement." So, although I don't share that perception of myself or self-publishing, I hereby resign that perceived position. I would appreciate it if everyone reading this would perceive that resignation — you know, really *feel* that I have resigned as King of the Self-Publishers or whatever title you perceive me as having had for however long you have perceived me as having had it. And I would appreciate it if you could perceive that I have no *feelings* about your creativity and that I have no *feelings* about your decisions. I don't admire you, I don't hate you, I don't love you, I'm not suspicious of you, I'm not jealous of you, I'm not embittered toward you, I'm not disappointed by you, I'm not saddened by you, I'm not delighted by you, I'm not proud of you, and I'm not ashamed of you.

Please. If you can fit only *one* thought, one *idea* into a fixed positon in your emotion-ravaged lives, let it be this one thought:

No matter what I do, Dave Sim is not going to *feel* anything about it one way or the other.

Do what you think is best. If you're not capable of that, do what you *feel* is best.

And live with the consequences.

Gerhard suggested that I finish with a joke. Great idea! It seems that Batton Lash waylaid Larry Marder at A.P.E. in San Jose and told him that he — Batton — had to ask Larry a very serious question. Batton had heard from a reliable source (altogether unlikely in California, but I'll let that go) that Larry had said that "Dave Sim with his Spirits of Independence stops is like Dave Koresh holed up in his compound in Waco, Texas." Larry got that look on his face that he gets when he's processing a new piece of information and it's not fitting into any of his mental files. "No," Larry said cautiously, having found the closest match in his onboard computer. "I did *say that the comic-book field is like Jonestown."*

Larry paused again as he analyzed the discrepancy for a suitable conclusion.

"We don't have any guns, *man. All we have is our poisoned Kool-Aid."*

I was still laughing about that one an hour after I hung up.

Want to know a little more about Dave Sim?

Fuck the *Comics Journal*, you need. . .

FILLER!

As most of you know, Dave Sim doesn't get interviewed very often, and when he does, it's usually by Gary Groth. Tired of that same old shit? Well now you've got an alternative. Filler! has just conducted a massive 18,000 word interview with him. Issue no. 4 (100 pages—No Ads!) includes 26 pages of earth-pig wisdom from the man himself. Here, Sim elaborates on:

- controversial issue 186!
- why Paul McCartney is an asshole!
- why TV is shit!
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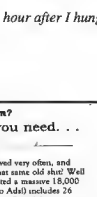
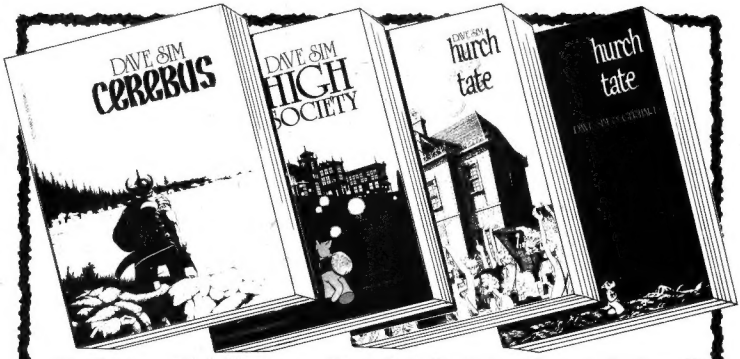
- . . .and tons more!



And that's not all! You get exclusive interviews with Mercury Rev, The Wedding Presents, author Michael Chabon and bracing new fiction by Craig Nickerson. Like we said, No Ads, so we need you to help keep us going. Yeah, we all know Dave hates interviews, but now you can find out what else he hates!

Send $4.00 to: FILLER! P.O. Box 111, SLC Postal Outlet University of Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G0, Canada

Dave Sim, exhausted from proofreading his Comics Journal interview, passed on crawling through this one inch by inch. Variations between what he said and what was transcribed are doubtless of Rushdian proportions. *Caveat emptor.*



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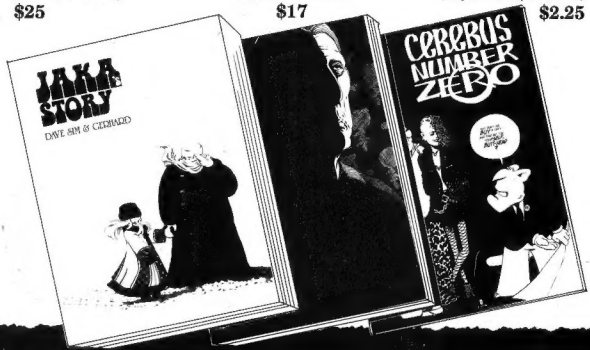

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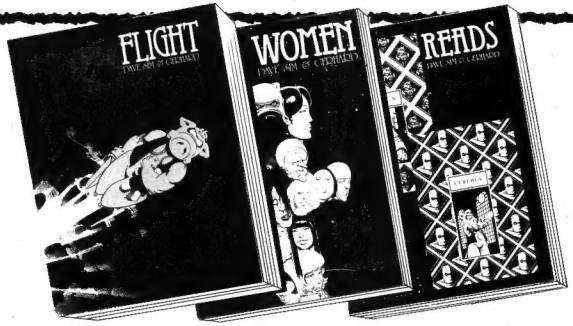

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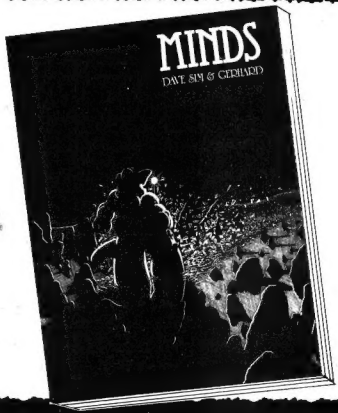

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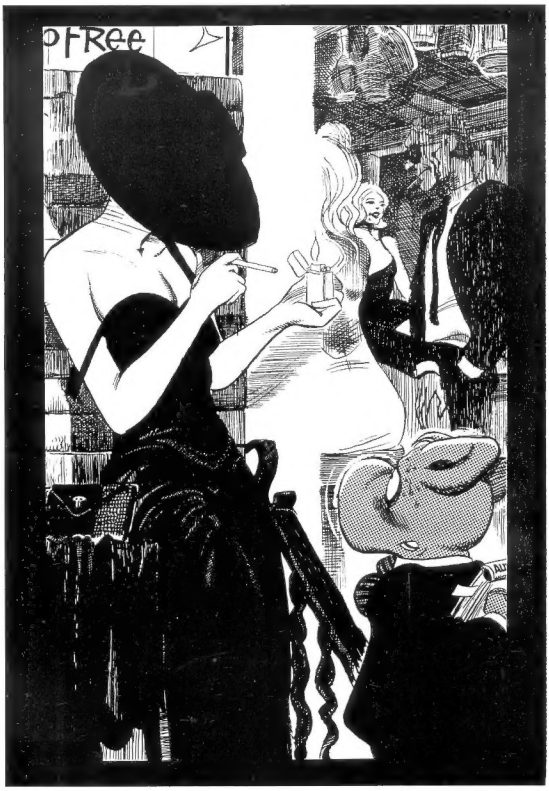

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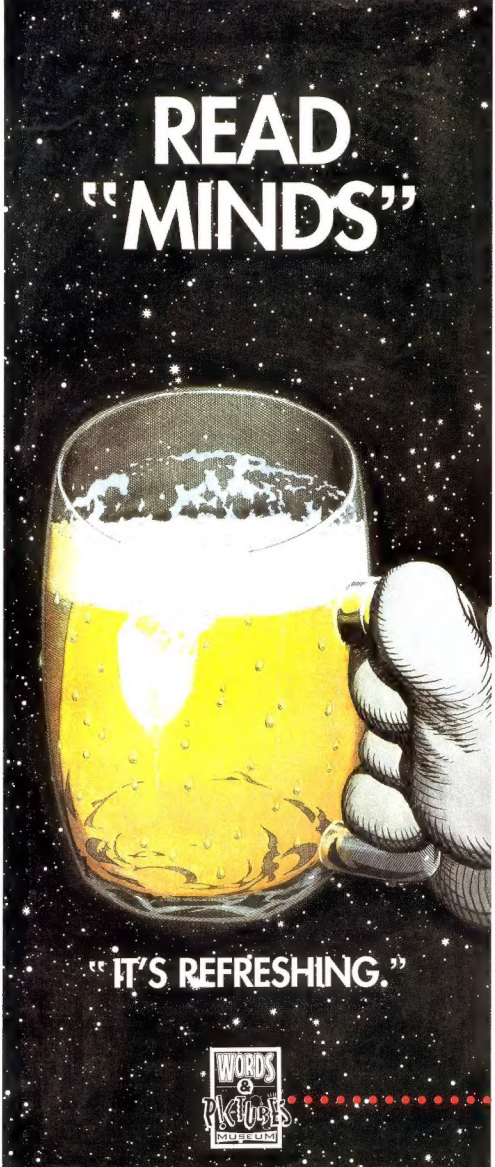

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